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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: MILITARY COURT HANDS OUT SENTENCES

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On October 7th a military tribunal in Burkina Faso examined and judged nine cases involving members of the military. In the end the judges dealt out sanctions ranging from monetary fines of about \$24 to a two-year jail sentence for an airman deserter. The fact that these trials were held in public, with press in attendance, and with a mixture of civilian and military judges, shows that Burkina Faso's military justice is willing to undergo public scrutiny and furthermore demonstrates that the military no longer operates in total impunity and that military members can be brought to trial. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) On October 7 the Military Tribunal of Ouagadougou examined nine cases implicating eleven members of the military and three civilians. The roving military court is composed of both civilian and military judges who together examine each case and decide on a verdict and sentence. The cases examined included:

- Traffic accident while driving a military vehicle (fine of \$120).
- Involuntary manslaughter while driving a military vehicle during a Prime Minister's security escort.  
(fine of \$24 and 12 months suspended jail sentence).
- Desertion during time of peace (two year jail sentence and a warrant for the airman's arrest).
- But also cases of driving infractions, corruption and insubordination.
- The remaining cases were dismissed for lack of evidence or no witnesses.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: The very fact that these trials occurred in the public eye and with a mixed civilian/military court is significant. The message communicated is clear: the Burkinabe military has been put on notice, and through this tribunal, and others like it held across Burkina Faso, the soldiers are being told that they no longer benefit from total immunity. They can now be held accountable for their actions and brought before a military court.  
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